

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)

Wastewater Works Operators Continuing Professional Education (CPE) Requirements

Introduction

This FAQ document was developed to provide information on commonly asked questions regarding continuing professional education requirements for wastewater works operators in Virginia.

It does not intend to replace or change the requirements contained in the Board for Waterworks and Wastewater Works Operators and Onsite Sewage System Professionals Statute (Title 54.1, Chapter 23) and accompanying regulations (effective January 1, 2010).

Should you have questions, please refer to the Board's regulations, available for download at: http://www.dpor.virginia.gov/dporweb/www_main.cfm.

1. What is continuing professional education?

Wastewater works operators are expected to develop professionally within their career field. Continuing professional education includes, but is not limited to, distance learning and/or attending face-to-face workshops. To ensure minimum levels of continuing education are achieved, the Board for Waterworks and Wastewater Works Operators and Onsite Sewage System Professionals (Board) requires continuing professional education (CPE) for wastewater works operators. The requirement became effective March 1, 2010. Part I of the regulations defines the following:

"Continuing Professional Education (CPE)": Participation in a structured training activity that enables a licensee to maintain and increase the competence required to assure the public's protection.

"Contact hour": One contact hour is equal to 50 minutes of participation in a structured training activity.

"Structured training activity": A formal educational process designed to permit a participant to learn a given subject or subjects through interaction with an instructor in a course, seminar, conference, or other performance-oriented format, or distance learning.

2. How many CPE contact hours are required?

The number of CPE contact hours required depends on what license class you held at the beginning of the license cycle. Requirements are shown below:

Classes 1 through 3 = a minimum of 20 CPE contact hours per two-year cycle
Class 4 = a minimum of 16 CPE contact hours per two-year cycle

The two-year cycle in which the continuing professional education is to be obtained runs from March 1st every even-numbered year through the end of February of the next even-numbered year. Listed below are the two-year cycles for the next six years:

March 1, 2010 through February 29, 2012

March 1, 2012 through February 28, 2014

March 1, 2014 through February 29, 2016

3. Where can I find a list of “approved” CPE courses?

CPE courses do not require advance approval from the Board. The subject matter addressed during CPE contact hours must be limited to the content areas covered by the board's examination, appropriate to the license for which renewal is sought. The content areas can be found in the Wastewater Works Operators Candidate Information Bulletin (CIB) at: http://candidate.psiexams.com/bulletin/display_bulletin.jsp?ro=yes&actionname=83&bulletinid=167&bulletinurl=.pdf. Should you have doubts, refer to 18VAC160-20-109 to determine if the course in question meets the Board's CPE requirements.

Note: (1) Classes on safety subjects can only be used for up to one-half of the total CPE required contact hours. (2) CPE credit for the same training course or structured training activity completed more than once during a single license renewal cycle to meet the CPE requirement is prohibited.

4. Is distance learning (e.g., webinars) acceptable for CPE credit?

"Distance learning" is defined as participation in a training activity, with or without interaction with an instructor, who utilizes DVDs, videos, or other audio/visual materials, or is computer-based.

Distance learning courses that cover the examination content areas listed in the CIB will be accepted. Documentation of distance learning must meet the requirements of 18VAC160-20-109D. A certificate of completion with this information should be requested for your records.

5. Are continuing education units (CEUs) and training credits (TCs) convertible to CPE contact hours?

Any course approved by the Board for substitution as training credits or formal education semester hours, as provided for in 18VAC160-20-150, is acceptable on an hour-for-hour basis for CPE contact hours. One (1) training credit (TC) or one (1) continuing education unit (CEU) is awarded for every ten (10) contact hours of classroom training or every twenty (20) contact hours of laboratory exercises and field trips.

For example, an activated sludge workshop, all lecture, is scheduled from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. with an hour off for lunch. The workshop is worth seven (7) CPE contact hours or 0.7 training credits with completion of the course.

Training credits can be used, where applicable as per 18VAC160-20-150, as substitution of work experience. Training credits that can be awarded for training completion must be approved by

the Board. The application for training credit course approval is available at: http://www.dpor.virginia.gov/dporweb/www_form.cfm.

6. What if I am awarded both TCs and CPEs? Can I use them both?

Yes. You may use both training credits (TCs) awarded for experience substitution and CPE contact hours awarded for meeting the continuing professional education requirements for the same workshop during a single license cycle.

7. Can I use my college courses for CPE credit?

Yes. The subject matter of the college course must be relevant to the license for which renewal is sought. One (1) semester hour of college credit is equal to fifteen (15) CPE contact hours, and one (1) quarter hour (term) of college credit is equal to ten (10) CPE credit hours.

8. What documentation is required?

18 VAC 160-20-109 D requires the following information to document completion of CPE contact hours:

- The sponsor's name, address and telephone number
- The date(s) of the training
- Description of the subject matter presented
- A statement signed by the sponsor that verifies the number of hours completed

We encourage all CPE sponsors to use the CPE Certificate of Completion form located at: http://www.dpor.virginia.gov/dporweb/www_form.cfm.

9. How long do I have to maintain my training records?

Each licensee is required to maintain evidence of completed CPE contact hours for a period of at least two years following the end of the license renewal cycle for which the CPE was taken. Example: If the current license cycle runs from 2010-2012, you are required to maintain records of CPE training until March 1, 2014.

10. Must CPE certificates be signed by course instructors, or is it acceptable for them to be signed by the course sponsor or site manager?

CPE certificates must be signed by someone in a position to confirm that the person named on the certificate actually completed the training identified. CPE certificates may be signed by the sponsor or sponsor's agent (instructor, proctor, or coordinator).

11. What if I am the Instructor?

CPE instructors who hold a license issued by the board may receive CPE credit for the time spent actually instructing subject matter that is pertinent to their license.

CPE instructors who hold a license issued by the board may be granted two additional hours of CPE credit for the initial development of, or the substantial updating of, a CPE activity that is pertinent to the license held for each hour spent delivering the initial presentation.

Note: CPE credit for (1) the initial development or the substantial updating of a CPE course or activity pertinent to the instructor's license or (2) instruction of a CPE course or activity

pertinent to the instructor's license can only be used for CPE credit once, for the same subject matter, during a single renewal cycle. The CPE sponsor or the instructor's supervisor can provide written documentation of the related hours.

12. How will the Board verify I have completed the CPE requirement?

Your compliance with the CPE requirement will be verified by a random audit. Do not send CPE certificates with your renewal application. Three to four months after the license cycle ends, a percentage of licensed wastewater works operators is randomly selected for audit. The percentage is determined by the Board.

If you are selected for audit, you will receive a letter requesting that you complete and return a CPE Audit form. The CPE Audit form requests that you list the CPE contact hours you completed during the recently ended license cycle and provide copies of the training completion documents received for the training listed. You will be given a reasonable amount of time to respond, usually four weeks. Board staff will evaluate the material you submit and advise you in writing if you are in compliance with the CPE requirement or if additional information is necessary.

13. When can I expect a renewal notice to arrive and what do I do if I do not receive the renewal notice?

Renewal notices are mailed to your address of record approximately 45 days prior to license expiration. If you have not received your renewal notice, check the address on your license. If it is not your current address, immediately notify DPOR, in writing.

You may renew your license by mailing a copy of your license along with your new address, renewal fee, and a signed statement requesting an address change to DPOR.

Send all correspondence to:

Board for Waterworks and Wastewater Works Operators and Onsite Sewage System Professionals
Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation
9960 Mayland Drive, Suite 400
Richmond, VA 23233-1463

Note: The Board's regulations require you to report to the Board, in writing, any change in your name or address within 30 days after the change occurs.

14. What happens if I have NOT obtained the required number of CPE hours by the license renewal date?

The Board does not expect its licensees to have difficulty meeting the requirement. Should a licensee find that he is having or may have difficulty meeting the CPE requirement, he should contact DPOR staff well before the end of the license renewal cycle to request additional time to meet the CPE requirement. However, CPE hours earned during a license renewal cycle to satisfy the CPE requirements of the preceding license renewal cycle are only valid for the preceding license renewal cycle.

15. What happens if I indicate at renewal that I have obtained the required CPE hours and a subsequent audit of my record indicates otherwise?

Obtaining or renewing a license through fraudulent means or misrepresentation is grounds for disciplinary action (18VAC160-20-140.1). You could be fined up to \$2,500. In addition, your license may be suspended or revoked.

16. If I've had my license for 18 months, do I have to meet CPE requirements?

No. CPE requirements do not apply for the renewal of wastewater works operators or provisional licenses held for less than two years.

17. I hold a waterworks operator license and a wastewater works operator license. Can a training course be used for CPE credit for both licenses?

In order for CPE contact hours to be considered for both licenses, two conditions must be met: (1) the content of the CPE contact hours (course) must cover materials from both the waterworks operator and wastewater works operator examinations and (2) the training must be taken during the license cycle of both licenses. If the content of the CPE contact hours (course) addresses only the content of the waterworks examination, then the CPE contact hours will not satisfy wastewater works CPE requirements and vice versa.

For an example, an operator who holds both a wastewater works license (license cycle March 1, 2010, through February 29, 2012) and a waterworks license (license cycle March 1, 2011, through February 28, 2013) completed CPE contact hours in March of 2011. The content of the CPE contact hours covered materials from the examinations for both licenses. Because the March of 2011 course was taken during the license cycle of both licenses and meets the CPE content requirement of both licenses, the CPE contact hours will be valid toward the wastewater works license that expires February 29, 2012, and the waterworks license that expires February 28, 2013.

If you are still unsure about the CPE requirements or need additional guidance, contact the Board office at:

(804) 367-8595 or WaterWasteOper@dpor.virginia.gov.